

STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES CONCERNING H.R. 3380, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO ISSUE RIGHT-OF-WAY PERMITS FOR NATURAL GAS PIPELINES WITHIN THE BOUNDARY OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

MARCH 19, 2002

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 3380, which would provide legal authority to permit existing and future natural gas pipelines within a portion of Great Smoky Mountains National Park near Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

The Department supports H.R. 3380. This legislation is identical to S. 1097 as amended and passed by the Senate on October 17, 2001.

H.R. 3380 would provide authority for the continuing operation and maintenance of an existing gas main that runs through Great Smoky Mountains National Park that has been in place since the 1960's. And, it would allow the Secretary of the Interior to authorize construction of new gas lines, where otherwise appropriate, across several linear park lands managed by Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The areas where the new pipelines would be allowed are: the Foothills Parkway, which extends parallel to the north boundary of the park for 70 miles; the Foothills Parkway Spur, a four-mile-long park road (also U.S. 441) which connects the gateway communities of Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg; and the Gatlinburg Bypass which links the Spur to the main body of the park. All three areas are linear lands that are managed as scenic transportation corridors. H.R. 3380 would not allow construction of natural gas lines across the main body of the park.

The need for this legislation came to the attention of the National Park Service last year, when Great Smoky Mountains National Park received a request from Sevier County Utility District in Tennessee for permission

to install a new natural gas pipeline across the park-owned Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Spur right-of-way (U.S. 441) in order to provide gas service to a new development in the city of Gatlinburg. Under 16 U.S.C. 79, the Secretary of the Interior may permit rights-of-way through units of the National Park System for electrical, phone, water, sewer and some other utility services, but that general authority explicitly does not authorize installation of natural gas or petroleum product-bearing lines.

Between the 1990 Census and the 2000 Census the population of Sevier County, Tennessee, which includes Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, grew by 39 percent, making it the state's third fastest-growing county. Within the county some of the most rapid growth is occurring between the Foothills Parkway and the main body of the park in areas not currently served by natural gas, other than the single six-inch line along the Spur to Gatlinburg.

The single greatest natural resource problem in Great Smoky Mountains National Park is declining air quality. Its vistas are reduced by particulate emissions. Ozone levels in the park's higher elevations reaches levels that pose a hazard to human health under Environmental Protection Agency standards. High elevation streams and soils are becoming increasingly acidified by airborne acid deposition which is threatening plants, wildlife and aquatic systems. A large proportion of this pollution is produced by coal-generated electrical power plants. Significant progress is being made to reduce emissions from power generation, and that progress could be aided by the use of natural gas. The authority provided by H.R. 3380 would enable greater usage of natural gas.

The need for an authorization for existing natural gas pipelines stems from the developments that led to current National Park Service management of the Foothills Parkway Spur. The Foothills Parkway Spur was built by the Federal government in the 1950's on land acquired by the State of Tennessee and donated to the Federal government. In 1963, an agreement was signed between the National Park Service and the State of Tennessee that called for the Spur to be transferred back to the State after the Federal government built the Gatlinburg Bypass on other lands donated by the State. Subsequent to the 1963 agreement, the National

Park Service allowed construction of a six-inch natural gas main down the Spur which still provides the only gas service to Gatlinburg.

At that time, the National Park Service's only concern was to ensure that the line's installation was acceptable to the State of Tennessee as the land's future owner. Although the Gatlinburg Bypass was completed in 1968, the State has declined, for a variety of reasons, to accept the Spur back into State ownership, leaving the National Park Service with a pipeline it has no current authority to permit. This legislation will allow for the continued operation and maintenance of this line.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.